

# Newsletter

Volume 12 Issue 1

January 2006

## Newton's Community Preservation Act: 2006 Application Round-Up

By Andreae Downs

**M**ore than \$6 million in proposals are vying for roughly \$4 million in Community Preservation funds in this Fiscal Year. Among the largest and best supported, if one is to count the number of people who pack each hearing, is for \$2.9 million to pay for artificial turf installation in two run-down Newton South High School fields that are also shared by two middle schools and numerous community sports leagues.

At a Community Preservation Committee working session Dec. 6, Mayor David Cohen, who is one of the co-applicants, expanded the proposal. If the CPC agrees to pay the entire \$2.9 request, Cohen said he would put up to \$2 million in city-bonded funds from the Capital Improvement Plan toward turf in the application's fields—which include soccer and softball—as well as the NSHS baseball field. In addition, the city would upgrade the nearby track. The committee will be looking at the details of this proposal in the next months.

Budget constraints have Community Preservation Committee members searching for ways to phase, bond and defer applications rather than denying them outright. Already, they have reduced the amounts granted for two historic, city-owned property studies, and asked the proponents of Stearns & Pellegrini Park to come back with a phased budget that can be paid out over time.

The committee is further constrained by a predicted decrease in the state's contribution. Up to now, the state has given Newton a 1:1 funding match, which historically has meant about \$1.5 million beyond what the city raises locally. But committee members say by 2010, that contribution will drop by roughly \$1 million because of the statewide popularity of CPA. This leaves them reluctant to bond projects.

In all, 11 applications met the Oct. 3 deadline. A committee of 11 League members read all of these proposals and met twice to discuss the ones still on the table before the November 1 CPC hearing (two were withdrawn, another added).

The League committee's recommendations and questions, which appear in shortened form below, were endorsed by the Board, and Andreae Downs presented them at the hearing. CPC members said that the League's comments this year were particularly valuable.

The reading committee included Deb Crossley, AnnaMaria Abernathy, Andrea Kozinetz Holz, Andrea Kelley, Myra Tattenbaum, Jennifer Stoner, Sue Rosenbaum, Roberta Leviton, Priscilla Leith, and Amelia Koch.

*Continued on page2*

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### INFORMATIONAL MEETING Traffic and Parking in Newton

Where the problems originate and some measures for dealing with them. Alderman Christene Snow Samuelson, Chair of the Public Safety and Transportation committee, and Candace Havens, Chair of the Traffic Council and Nina Wang, Acting Engineer will join in our discussion. Bring your lunch and become informed!

Wednesday, January 11, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.,

*Bring your lunch and become informed!*

*see calendar for details*

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### NEWSLETTER

Editor	Ann Grantham	617-964-0333
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The LWVN Newsletter is published nine times per year. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization open to all citizens of voting age. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 617-964-0014.

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# Community Preservation Act

THE PROPOSALS AND THE LEAGUE'S COMMENTS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW:

## Recreation Category

### Field Upgrades – Newton South High School

**Submitted by:** NEWTURF (Newton Committee to promote Infield Synthetic Turf Fields) a joint committee of the Mayor's Office, Newton youth sports organizations, and Newton Public Schools

**Location:** Newton South High School, Ward 8

**Funding requested:** \$2,995,000 (to be bonded over a 10-12 year period)

**Total Cost of Proposed Project:** \$2,995,000

**Description:** Use artificial turf on two fields at Newton South High School to increase availability of use and reduce injuries. The turf is environmentally friendly, cutting the need for irrigation and chemicals and would resolve drainage problems. Other benefits include less maintenance due to no mowing or irrigation.

**Comments/Questions:** If this new product works as described, and has the longevity hoped for, then the installation would extend public use and access to a recreational facility, an appropriate use of CPA funding. Again, if it works as billed, additional benefits are clearly in lowered environmental and maintenance costs, and reducing player injuries.

However:

- This application does not address the real risks that the community assumes in funding this request. These are related to long-term reliability and longevity, neither of which has been tested:
  - The total savings is estimated at roughly \$740,000 over 24 years, but with some questionable assumptions, such as 10-year replacement. Most warranties for this kind of field are for 8 years (*see [www.farmington.k12.mi.us/sports/outdoorfacility\\_qa.html](http://www.farmington.k12.mi.us/sports/outdoorfacility_qa.html)*). How did the proponents develop these estimates?
  - These calculations also assume a ten year installed product life. Is this too optimistic?
  - Another questionable assumption is that the site, which is a filled wetland, will develop no problems of sinking or uneven surfaces.
  - Only \$23,100 is estimated for "demolition and site preparation." How was this estimate arrived at?
- Harvard has had problems with Jordan Field, on a similar site (*see [www.deas.harvard.edu/courses/es96/](http://www.deas.harvard.edu/courses/es96/)*) Are we sure our field will develop no such issues?
- Acknowledging the desirability of artificial turf, should CPA fund the entire cost?
  - The reduction of maintenance costs is a major argument. Since usage fees are supposedly paying the maintenance costs currently, and since annual maintenance costs will be drastically reduced, why is not some of the capital cost coming from these fees?
  - The application states that "funding of up to 5% of the amount of annual payments is anticipated to be provided" by the organizations using the field, and additional usage fees will be used to pay for maintenance costs, yet the proposed budget does not reflect this.
- If approved, this would be the third long-term, bonded project assumed by the CPA. Further, all three are in the same area of Newton, which raises equity and parity issues with other fields elsewhere in the City.
- The application assumes that more early evening games will be played. But the applicants acknowledge that they are not estimating the cost of lighting. Is the assumption of later games reasonable?

Continued on page three

# 2006 Application Round-Up

Note: At the December 6 working session, Mayor Cohen proposed including the baseball field and track in the application, for a total cost of roughly \$5 million. He challenged the sports booster clubs to raise the ca. \$400,000 for the bleachers, which CPA probably couldn't fund. He also said that he would provide up to \$2 million to make the combined proposal work.

The committee said they would entertain this proposal if it also included a detailed budget, permission to add water from the fields to the storm drain that runs under the field, approvals from the Parks & Recreation Commission, who have jurisdiction over the baseball field and track, and from the Conservation Commission, among other conditions.

## Stearns & Pellegrini Park (Phase one)

**Submitted by:** Parks & Recreation with CDBG Nonantum Advisory Committee, Planning & Development Dept.

**Location:** Jasset St./Watertown St and Hawthorn St./Lothrop St., Ward 1

**Cost:** \$1,490,000 of a total of \$1,635,000 – total for all phases about \$3 million.

**Description:** Beautification and improvements to two tired parks in Nonantum to maximize recreational opportunities for all ages, improve accessibility and “boost the spirit and involvement of the Nonantum community”

**Stearns:** new play equipment, rubberized safety surfacing, decorative metal fencing, reconstructed tennis courts, 1/2 court basketball, remove athletic lighting, accessible pathway linking to new senior housing, 2 new bubblers, benches and decorative trash receptacles

**Pellegrini:** formalize parking lot, create accessible pedestrian-only entrance, light pedestrian paths, reorganize courtyard, rubberized safety surfacing, add community gardens, improve water play equipment, construct a seatwall, fence courtyard, site equipment and bubblers.

**Comments/Questions:** The project has already started to build community in the Nonantum neighborhood.

However:

- The CPC paid \$30,000 for the planning of this park, and the fruits of this funding are demonstrated in the detailed plans submitted as part of this application. Therefore, is a 15% contingency necessary with the level of detail the plan includes?
- The request is for Phase I. Phase II will add roughly another million-to-1.5 million dollars in improvements.
- The League is also concerned about the water play pieces at Pellegrini, as they will require ongoing maintenance. Can the Parks & Recreation department afford to maintain them? A similar concern exists with bubblers—they are hard to maintain in a cold climate, and expensive to install.
- This is an expensive project. Should the entire \$1.5 million come from this year's fund?

**Recommendation:** Consider funding over time.

**Note:** On December 6, the CPC worked with the applicants to find a way to stage funding of the entire (Phase I and II) project to reflect actual expenditures. They also asked applicants to remove mural renovations (which aren't fundable under CPA), and to cut the contingency to 10%. The applicants are to return with a proposal that can be funded over time, without bonding, before a January 11 public hearing.

## Outdoor Intergenerational Community Classroom

**Submitted by:** Williams School PTO; co-sponsor Newton School Committee. The project would be developed on School Dept. land

**Location:** SW corner of Williams School playground, along Hancock St., Auburndale, Ward 4. Behind the school, which is located at 141 Grove St.

**Request:** \$17,000 from CPA funding out of \$20,000 total.

**Total Projected Construction Cost:** \$100,000

**Description:** This application presents a creative idea for an outdoor intergenerational community classroom and cultural gathering place for use by teachers, children, seniors at Lasell Village, and others in Auburndale's diverse population. The proponents suggest adding pathways, an outdoor chess/checker table, plantings, sculpture, sundial and birdhouses. They would like to reflect historic Auburndale through a structure that resembles a train station by H.H. Richardson that was dismantled in 1962.

**Comments/Questions:** The list of supporters is impressive and the proposal is well written, addressing the specifics of the CPC application. The proposal fits the CPC goals of leveraging private funds (\$3,000 coming from PTO) and distributing funds more equitably (Auburndale has no CPA projects as yet).

There are 15 elementary schools. So far, Zervas, Angier, Bowen, Cabot and Countryside either have or are planning an outdoor classroom (Bowen and Cabot with CPA funds). All are deserving of such a fine community classroom and cultural gathering place.

**Note:** At its November 16 working session, the CPC asked the applicants to revise their proposal to include:

1. A school department-appointed project manager,
2. More evidence of community support (funding),
3. Construction drawings should be part of the study proposed above
4. An endowment for maintenance.

The applicants returned December 6 with roughly \$4,000 in outside commitments, a project manager, and plan revised to include construction drawings. The CPC approved the application with new funds subtracted from the total (plus legal fees).

*Continued on page four*

Continued from page three

# Community Preservation Act

*Historic Preservation Category*

## Crafts Street Stable Exterior Building Historic Preservation Study

**Submitted by:** Department of Public Buildings,  
Department of Public Works

**Location:** 90 Crafts Street, Newtonville, Ward 2

**Request:** \$ 60,000 Total Eventual Cost: TBD

**Description:** The 'Crafts Street Stable', built in 1895, with its complimentary 1934 addition to the north, once housed the City's work horses. The building and grounds are now primarily used for Newton Dept of Public Works equipment storage, lockers and offices. The building is a classic example of public stables built in that era, and is a useful and needed building for city public works operations.

**Comments/Questions:** This application (and the Health Department one that follows) is much better than the one submitted last year. A more detailed budget, time line, and work scope have been added, as well as an RFP for the design services. The two-page description from the Newton History Museum affirms the building's historic significance and landmark designations.

Visiting the site, it is obvious that the list of exterior 'envelope' repairs should include, at least:

- A large amount of brick pointing; some replacement
- Replacement of all windows (which, if they must be wood for historic accuracy, should be high performance NEW window units (not rebuilt)
- Sealing and insulating of the envelope, which may require gutting from the inside
- Slate & copper roof repairs

The proposal states that it seeks funds for 'envelope repairs' which are urgent or the building could be lost.

However, to repair only the facade of this building, without considering how the envelope works to weatherize and seal the building, would be irresponsible. That is, it should be studied for energy efficiency, indoor air quality (temperature, humidity, CO2 level) and infiltration, and HVAC system performance. It would be reasonable for the CPC to request operating expense logs for the building, and suggest that if money is to be spent to restore the shell, a way to justify that long term is to protect the building from further deterioration from the inside as well.

## Newton Health Dept Building Improvements

**Submitted by:** A Nicholas Parnell, Public Works  
Commissioner

**Location:** 1294 Centre St., Newton Centre, Ward 6

**Request:** \$20,750, cost of project TBD

**Description:** Develop plans to renovate, repair or replace masonry and windows, repair internal termite damage, repair sidewalks.

**Comments/Questions:** This is another Newton treasure, built by private subscription in the 1930s as a neighborhood library. It should be preserved for future generations.

**Recommendation** (both city proposals):

The League recommends considering expanding the scope of these proposals to preserve the community's investment

Update: At its November 16 working session, the Community Preservation Committee approved these two proposals, which they asked be bundled to maximize economies of scale. Nick Parnell agreed that energy audits would be included in the project.

## Brigham Community House

**Submitted by:** Bob Staulo

**Category:** Historic Preservation / Recreation

**Location:** 20 Hartford Street, Newton Highlands, Ward 6

**Cost:** \$419,000 Construction, contingency and fees

**Description/History:** Built in 1886, the Queen Anne style Victorian is listed on the National Register of Historic places. It was acquired by the City of Newton in 1951 from the Brigham family, used as a branch library until 1991, when it was deemed 'surplus property', and left to weather.

A number of years ago, it was reopened as a teen and community center, by a dedicated group of volunteers who saw a need for youth services on the south side of the city. Targeted fundraisers have paid for urgent but modest repairs to allow the building to remain open. A wheelchair ramp was added to the front entry. In November 2003, the CPC heard a request for \$105,600 to effect further restoration, but only \$20K was awarded in the spring of 2004, to hire a professional to prepare a detailed workscope and budget for the restoration and renovations. The workscope and budget estimate prepared by Russell Feldman of TBA Architects accompanies this proposal.

**Comments/Questions:** The application has merit in both categories: historic preservation and recreation. The house is architecturally interesting and worth preserving; if the city is committed to this structure as a youth and community center, then a comprehensive restoration and renovation should be executed soon.

*Welcome New Member!*

JENNIFER STONER  
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# 2006 Application Round-Up

## *Historic Preservation Category*

However, the League has questions about the budget, long-term maintenance and the scope of work:

- According to the budget outline, only 2/3 of the requested \$419,000 is for a modest range of repairs and renovations. Layers of contingencies, fees, and inflation factors make up the rest. Is this excessive?
  - Given that higher maintenance costs are assured for an historic wood framed house under heavy use, what is the long-term plan for repairs and maintenance and how will the city afford the cost?
  - In 2003, the applicants' request included funding for a new boiler and chimney relining. This has not yet been purchased and installed, and would seem an essential part of assuring that the building serve its users safely and comfortably. Why does it not appear as part of this work?
  - Why is the request to insulate only one very small area of the building before it is repainted? Why not the entire envelope?
  - If a complete and enduring renovation of this facility is to occur for the intended use, then an evaluation of the building envelope and mechanical systems should be included in the scope, and renovations performed as indicated. This would both extend the life of the investment, help to provide user comfort and control operating costs.
- Recommendations:
- Consider how the construction bid process may be streamlined to reduce costs;
  - Expand the scope of work to include a comprehensive 'stabilization' of the envelope to protect the long-term

investment, assure reliability and comfort for occupants, and lower operating costs.

- Understand and plan for long-term maintenance and operating costs against total building use.

## Peirce School Historic Restoration

Submitted by: Peirce School Associates  
(Meredith Management)

Categories: Historic preservation, Community housing

Location: 88 Chestnut St., West Newton, Ward 3

Cost: \$399,825 of a total \$526,300 estimated cost

Description: This is a beautiful, city-owned building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Once the Peirce Elementary School, then a multi-purpose administrative building used as a polling place, it was renovated for elderly and handicapped apartments for low-income tenants in the 1980s. After 25 years, many repairs are needed, mainly on the exterior, to repair the stonework, gutters, roof, and other major building components.

Comments/Questions: It is unfortunate that a city-owned building which is privately managed and fully funded with Housing and Urban Development subsidies would not have a built-in budget for such routine maintenance as re-pointing, roofing, and stonework.

The League questions whether this can be called "community housing," since it does not add to the city's housing stock.

We are concerned that funding this proposal will set a precedent, that other privately managed city buildings may come for CPA funds in the future.

## *Open Space Category*

### The Bowen Park Initiative

Submitted by: The Newton School Department, Bowen Elementary School PTO

Location: Bowen School, Cypress St., Newton Centre, Ward 6

Funding requested: \$181,840 Total Cost: \$233,820

Description: Serious drainage problems and flooding are being addressed by City engineers who are designing a new drainage system. After that plan is in place, this proposal undertakes a community wide habitat restoration effort for Bowen Woods, enhancement of the Bowen School park: planting a lawn, building an amphitheatre, building walkways, replacing play equipment, installing seating and shade. Educational benefits include a composting program, water collection, outdoor classroom curriculum, raised beds, weather stations, birds and butterflies garden and pilot program with Angino Farm proposed.

Comments/Questions: A very well considered and documented proposal with a strong network of community support and

other fundraising sources. A site visit showed evidence of the need for a new drainage system and work underway as of mid-October.

Bowen School staff and the PTO have reputable people to manage the ongoing project.

This is a model application, answering every criterion and question and containing all relevant documentation. The community support is shown by the effort behind the application, and by the financial support: \$12,000 raised so far, \$26,000 in-kind donations, \$4,500 pledge from a trust, \$12,500 due from the Marathon Fund in 2006.

Recommendation: The League enthusiastically supports this proposal.

Update: On December 6, the CPC voted to fund slightly less than the full request (the School Department will assume some of the costs), with the understanding that the project manager will find a more durable surface for over-used playing fields than grass.

*Continued on page seven*



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## CPA 2006 Application Round Up

*O p e n S p a c e C a t e g o r y*

### Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park

**Submitted by:** Friends of Albemarle Park, with co-applicants- Newton Parks & Recreation Commission and The Playground Project at Albemarle

**Location:** Albemarle Rd. parcels #21022 0001 and 21022 0002, Ward 2

**Cost:** \$ 60,000 design phase (this request)

\$400,000 construction phase (estimate, not included)

\$100,000 bridge construction (estimate, not included)

\$560,000 Total Cost

**Description:** Part of a Plan for Albermarle Park done pro bono by Judy Kokesh of the Harvard University/Arnold Arboretum program in landscape design, with financial support from the Newton Conservators. The design goals are to improve the layout, and provide landscaping and safety improvements to the pathway that link the F.A. Day Middle School with the bus stop area on Albemarle Road. It would also remove invasive shrubs and weeds from the south edge of Avery Wood, remove chain link fences in the ball field, add landscaping along Cheesecake Brook, install lighting for passive recreation, and replace the unsafe footbridge across the Brook.

**Comments/Questions:** The area is sorely in need of safety and aesthetic improvements. It is a neglected stretch of unsheltered field through which F.A. Day students walk every day to get back and forth to school. A better pedestrian route traversing the field to Day with sightlines to buses, etc. is a good goal. The idea is good, but should be further developed.

- Are there any other funding sources - i.e., neighborhood groups, fundraising plans, state money to improve waterways?
- If bridge is the "primary emergency evacuation route" for Day, this is a valid safety concern. Is it well located for both general and critical use? e.g.: Should it be relocated nearer to the pathway to F.A. Day School?

## Community Housing

### Newton Homebuyer Assistance Program (NHAP)

**Submitted by:** City of Newton Planning and Development

**Location:** Housing Office, 492 Waltham St., West Newton

**Funding requested:** \$1,052,500, Total Cost: \$1,242,500

**Description:** This is a request for additional funding for a successful pilot program. The Newton Homebuyer Assistance Program (NHAP) provides income qualified homebuyers with additional financing options, including homebuyers with a City of Newton connection and first-time homebuyers without one. The initial CPA grant of \$500,000 was awarded in April 2004.

By now, four cases have been completed and about 2/3 of the funding expended. Between 10 and 14 new cases are expected.

**Recommendation:** This is a worthy program, which the LWVN enthusiastically supports. We suggest that the CPC require annual review of this program for additional funding.

**Still to come:** The Planning Department has recently received a housing proposal for Cambria Road (Ward 2, \$320,000). The CPC staff anticipate housing proposals for Newell Road (Ward 4, \$250,000) and Covenant House (Ward 7, \$1,700,000) in this Fiscal Year. ■

## LWVN CALENDAR

### January

- 2 Monday, **February Newsletter Deadline**
  - 5 Thursday, 6:30 p.m. **Working Board Meeting /Potluck**  
6:30 p.m. at the home of Ann Grantham,  
46 East Side Parkway, Newtonville 617-964-0333.
  - 10 Wednesday , 7:30 p.m. **Local Action Committee Meeting**, at the  
home of Myra Tattenbaum, 210 Upland Ave., Newton Highlands,  
617-527-2830.
  - 11 Wednesday, 11:30 A.M.- 1:30 p.m., **Informational Meeting:  
Traffic and Parking**, at the home of AnnaMaria Abernathy,  
45 Islington Rd., Auburndale, 617-244-3447 Brown Bagging  
Encouraged. Snow Date: January 18th at the home of  
Fran Seasholes, 163 Cypress St., 617-969-5927.
- 7:15 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting** at the home of Bonnie Carter,  
177 Homer St., Newton Centre, 617-969-0686  
Chair - Ann Grantham

### February

- 2 Thursday, **Working Board Meeting /Potluck** 6:30 p.m.  
at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, Newtonville  
617-964-0333
- 8 Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., **Discussion Meeting with Consensus**,  
“Master Plan for Newton’s Parks, Open Space and Recreation  
Facilities”  
  
Wednesday, 7:15 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting** at the home of  
Andreae Downs, 854 Chestnut St., 617-969-7123 Chair – Sharyn
- 9 Thursday, 7:30 p.m., **Discussion Meeting with Consensus**,  
“Master Plan for Newton’s Parks, Open Space and Recreation  
Facilities”, at the home of Cathy Offenber, 211 Greenwood St.,  
Newton Centre, 617-244-9590. Snow date February 16)

## Legislative Roundtable



For current schedule log on to  
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